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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT WEDNESDAY January 31, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: NOTES ON THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE. Information from the Office of Information, United States Department of Agriculture.

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The Nation's Capital is a great city for meetings and conferences. At almost any time of year people are gathered here from all parts of the country to confer on some subject of national interest.

But during the last 10 days Washington had a meeting of interest to every American citizen but especially to mothers and fathers. This was the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy -- the fourth of these national meetings on children to be sponsored by a President of the United States. Like the Census, these meetings have come every ten years since President Theodore Roosevelt started the idea in 1909. President Woodrow Wilson called the second conference in 1919, and President Hoover the third in 1930.

At the conference held the other day President and Mrs. Roosevelt, cabinet members, doctors, lawyers, educators, authorities on agriculture, labor, and social service, and a number of leading citizens who are parents took part in this great report on the state of the Nation's children.

Here are some of the facts that came out about the education of American children today. According to the report, school attendance has been made compulsory by law yet many children are not attending school. A late estimate gave some 810 thousand children between 7 and 13 years not in school, most of them from the poorest rural areas.

The report said that the Nation's farmers are supporting 31 percent of the Nation's children on only 9 percent of the Nation's money. This country is centering

most of its education on groups having the fewest children, and giving the least to groups that are filling up our population and providing the most of our future citizens.

The little red school house came in for plenty of criticism at this conference. Leaders said the district school can and should be replaced. No need for it exists today in most States. Most of the 120 thousand local school districts are too small to support proper schools. Even with very high taxes the funds are not enough to pay a teacher's salary to say nothing of the cost of building, equipment, books, supplies, and transportation.

Another interesting report brought out facts on child labor today. Child labor still remains one of the most serious problems in the country. Children continue to be employed not only in commercialized agriculture, street trades and industrial home work, but also in some retail stores, laundries, beauty parlors, garages, and all types of repair shops.

The now familiar story of the migrant family and the evils of commercialized agriculture for child laborers came up again in the report. Children employed in cultivating sugar beets, on truck farms, on gathering fruits and vegetables are a serious problem. Certain kinds of agriculture employing three-fourths of all children under 16 who work have practically no control except the school-attendance laws, often not rigidly enforced. Many of the children have no education and have unfavorable living and working conditions. Worse still, wages for whole families will hardly keep them even during the farming season.

However, the Federal Sugar Act of 1937 may give some help to these working children. This act specifies a minimum age of 14 for employment of children and an 8-hour day for children between 14 and 16 for all employers who receive benefits.

Still another report at the Conference brought out facts on the American family. Small families are becoming the rule rather than the exception. Families

began to grow smaller more than a century ago. Family size has taken the greatest cut in cities. Farm populations have a higher proportion of children than cities. The South has the highest proportion of children, the Far West the lowest.

During the depth of the depression the number of marriages and also divorces dropped, but both marriages and divorces have increased since 1933. The birthrate reaches its low mark in 1933. Since then the birthrate has been rising slightly.

But statistics don't show all the changes in the American family. Conference leaders point out in their report on the family that as families grow smaller, there are fewer uncles, cousins and aunts, not to speak of brothers and sisters to share family joys and sorrows. They say this places a greater "emotional load" upon the few members of the small family. Child experts also point out that as fewer tasks go on in the home, the number of things families can do together are fewer. So many of the simpler and easier ways of giving responsibility to growing children have gone out of the family's control.

But the conference report on the family was far from pessimistic. To people who say the family is crumbling, they reply: "The family is merely turning its face to new problems." They report that "democracy still looks to the family as its foundation."

And that concludes the news for today on the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy.